

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

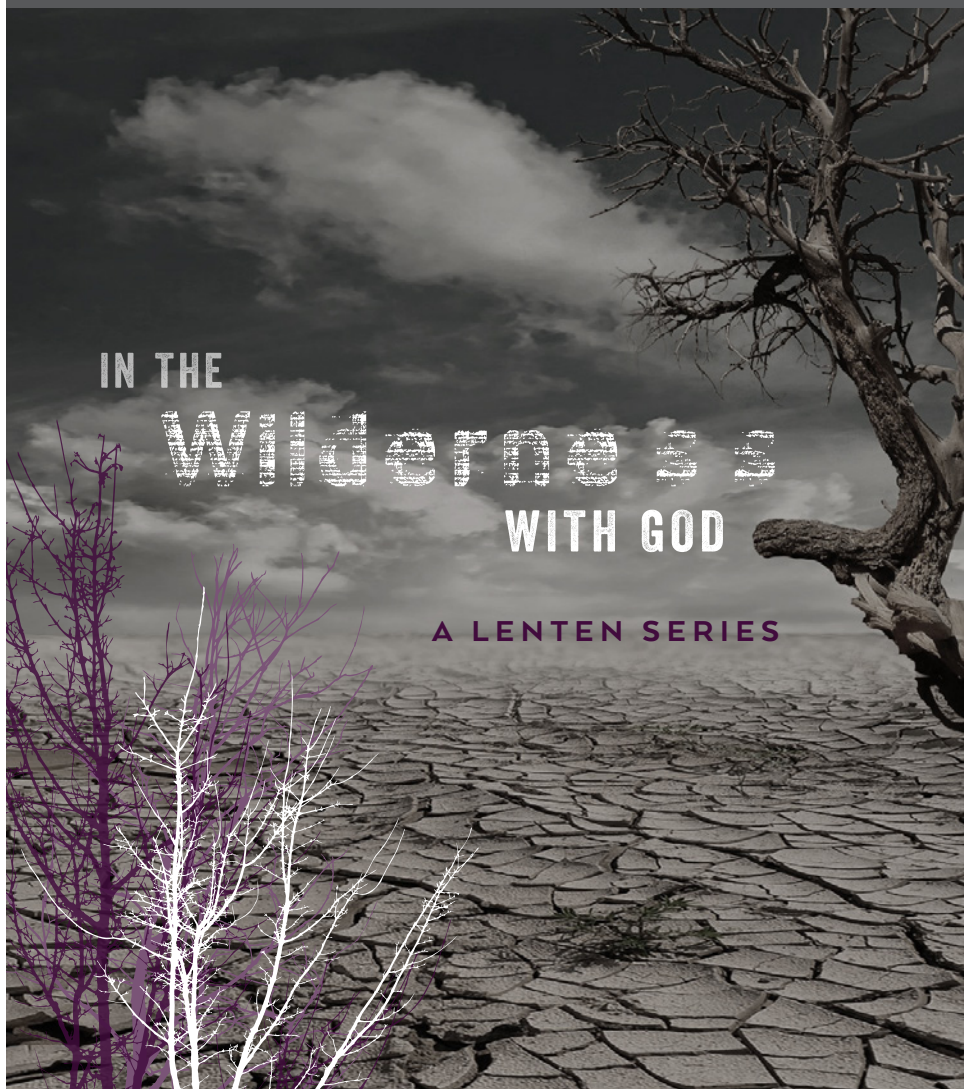
APRIL 1 - 5, 2019

IN THE

WILDERNESS

WITH GOD

A LENTEN SERIES



Fourth Week of Lent

“A gift of Lent is that its focus on sin, darkness, and death is an antidote to any lingering sentimentality that we seek to bring into Easter. This season of Lent insists, emphatically, that we—each and all—are sinners. We are victimizers, not just victims; hedonists, not just heroes. If themes of devotion to Christ and discipleship induce visions of an unswerving and even path of ever-increasing spiritual success, the practice of Lent and the pages of Scripture disabuse us of any such notions.

“In the midst of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, we find an embarrassingly painful display of weakness, confusion, even imbecility of His earliest followers. ... [Jesus closest followers are at] first arrogant, then afraid, then hiding. They were cowardly, disloyal, and unfaithful. These holy martyrs and saints, these dearest friends of Jesus, failed miserably and utterly at the time of greatest crisis, when courage was most needed.”

This subplot of Holy Week gives me hope. We too have seasons of doubt, questioning and failure. “Each of us and all of us together are law-breakers, bumbling and broken—and so were the Holy Apostles. But a risen Christ came to them, shocked them and they believed. The resurrection of Christ, the truth of the Gospel, is not made true or false by us who proclaim it. Instead, it makes us, broken vessels, into truth bearers.”

“The disciples had little hope to offer anyone, except that of a resurrected Messiah—an idea so preposterous, so unimaginable, that even they didn’t believe it until they saw the risen Christ themselves. When they did, their lives were changed.” We witness not because we are worthy, but because Jesus is alive. We point to Jesus, and it is only as others see Jesus that their lives too will be changed.

All quoted material was written by Tish Harrison Warren. “They Failed Him,” *Journey to the Cross: Lent/Easter 2019*. A Christianity Today Special Issue.

Keeping a Holy Lent

Things to give up during Lent

1. **Fear of Failure:** You don't succeed without experiencing failure. Just make sure you fail forward.
2. **Feelings of Unworthiness:** You are fearfully and wonderfully made by God.
3. **Impatience:** Count to 10 and extend grace.
4. **Blame:** Tell yourself, "I am not going to pass the buck. I will take responsibility for my actions."
5. **Guilt:** Remember, you are loved by God and forgiven. Today is a new day and the past is behind you.
6. **Overcommitment:** Do less better and accomplish more.
7. **Entitlement:** The world does not owe me anything. God does not owe me anything. I live in humility and grace.
8. **Apathy:** Life is too short not to care.
9. **Hatred:** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
10. **Complaining/Bitterness:** Put aside negative thoughts. Work to minimize contact with people who are negative and toxic. Instead of contributing to the problem, be the solution.
11. **Destructive Speech:** Encourage one another.
12. **Worry:** God is in control and worrying will not help.
13. **Resistance to Change:** Change is certain. It is not if we will change, but how we will change.
14. **Ungratefulness:** You have been blessed in a way greater than you realize. Give thanks.
15. **Reduce the Use of Electronics:** Spend more time making direct contact with others and less time utilizing electronics (i.e., instead of sending that text or email, pick up the phone and call)

Things to start doing during Lent

1. **Give away** something every single day, be it time, money, or something you own. Clean out closets and drawers. Donate, recycle, get rid of 40 things in 40 days.
2. **Make a list of 40 people** who have touched your life and each day write one of them a letter of appreciation.
3. **Plan to read the Sunday Scriptures** *before* you go to church. In the same way that reading up on football players, opposing teams, and coaching strategies will help you experience a game more fully, familiarizing yourself with the readings ahead of time will help you experience them in a deeper way on Sunday.
4. **Plan 40 acts of kindness**, and/or 40 phone calls to the important people in your life.
5. **Read the entire Gospel of Mark** in one sitting. As the shortest Gospel, it is the most concise story of Jesus' life.
6. **Unplug from your iPhone** or turn off your car radio on your commute. The silence may be jarring at first, but you may find that you are able to concentrate better and will be more observant of your surroundings.
7. **Plan to volunteer** at least one weekend or evening during Lent. Serve a meal at your local soup kitchen. Visit the elderly or those who are ill. Stock shelves at a food pantry; pick up litter; volunteer at church, etc.
8. **Pray for someone.** As you're walking the streets, driving the highways, or sitting in your cubicle at work, pick out a person who appears to be in need and pray for that person.
9. **Get to know your neighbors.** Introduce yourself, plan a dinner, or bring food to an older person on your block.

MONDAY

1 Kings 17:1-9

This week as we continue our series on “Finding God in the Wilderness,” we will be looking at the prophet Elijah. It seems Elijah’s whole life was lived in the wilderness. We do not know much about him. He just shows up on the scene, already known by the writer of Kings, in 1 Kings 17. The first words he speaks are words of judgment to King Ahab of Israel (the Northern Kingdom).

Because Ahab had married Jezebel and given in to her demands, the Northern Kingdom now worshipped Baal, and many of the prophets of God were killed. Though Baal was known as the “Rider of the Clouds,” Elijah pronounced that it was Yahweh who brought the gift of rain. And so, Elijah’s first recorded prophecy was that there was going to be a season of drought. During this season we find God miraculously taking care of Elijah even while Ahab and the Northern Kingdom suffered.

Because of the drought, Elijah ends up living with a widow from Zarephath. Both the location and circumstances are significant for this is the homeland of Jezebel. The drought has struck in the land of Baal worship. In this land, in Baal’s backyard so to speak, Yahweh is providing for His prophet and for this widow who takes God’s Word seriously. Jezebel in Israel is trying to turn people against

Yahweh; here in Zarephath this woman is taking God at His word, and the result is provision even in the midst of drought.

It seems that today we increasingly try to compromise or kill the Word of God. We take one part of the Word seriously, using it to judge others, while not allowing other parts to inform and judge our lives. We pick and choose what we want to hear. We cling to the promises and turn a deaf ear to God's commands.

Following God's Word can be costly. It might at times call us to stand apart from the crowd. It might call us not to give in to what we feel, to give up a desire or a temptation. Whether we follow God's Word or not shows whether we really believe Him to be Lord over all of life or not. When we take God's Word in earnest, others also see the Hand of God.

Where are you struggling with being obedient? Is there a place in your life where you are compromising with God's Word?

PRAYERS FOR BRIAN AND ANNA KLEINSASSER

Pray for Brian and Anna Kleinsasser, serving with Youth with a Mission (YWAM) in Kansas City, MO. They organize evangelistic events with churches and other Christian organizations to see people come to faith in Jesus Christ. Brian helps the coordination team in the strategic planning of campaign events, while also handling the accounting for the city outreaches.

TUESDAY

1 Kings 17:7-16; Luke 4:14-30

In Tim Keller's sermon on this passage, "A Widow's Joy," he says that one of the marks of God, as opposed to the false gods in our world today that many worship, is that God is an "outsider" God. To save Elijah, God sends him away from Israel to a pagan woman in a foreign country. "This is back in the time in which women had absolutely no rights. They were virtually nothing but property. God sends Elijah to a racial outsider, a moral outsider, a gender and economic outsider to save him. He shatters every single barrier that religion and society put between people.

"That's the reason Jesus says, 'There were a lot of widows in Israel during the famine, but where did God go? Who did He use? A pagan, poor, racially different woman,' and they wanted to kill him. Of course, they don't get it. Here's the question: Why would God do this? The answer is: God is a God of outsiders because the true God is a God of grace. The true God offers His salvation regardless of merit, regardless of pedigree, regardless of gender, regardless of class.

"It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter what kind of mess you are. In fact, it helps if you know you're a mess, because the only way you can know a God of grace is to know Him as a God of grace." (Timothy Keller)

All too often we seek God among the “religious.” We seek God among those whose lives seem together, those with abilities and intelligence. But God’s work is done in places and through people for whom others have little use. Why? Because God wants people to know that He is the One working, that His love is not based on merit, but purely on grace.

Often God’s work in your life will be through your weaknesses, not your strengths. As we have discovered, He will work through the wildernesses of our own makings and our failures, not our successes. The question is: Will we make these available to God? Will we allow God to work through others to save us, others we consider in some way unworthy? Are we willing to go to others, not just to serve them, but to allow them to serve us?

What barriers have you put up that cause you to miss the work and grace of God? Have you somehow boxed God in? Are you telling Him how to work?

PRAYERS FOR BRIAN AND ANNA KLEINSASSER

Pray for the discipleship of those attending the evangelistic YWAM events that their hearts would be stirred to seek Jesus every day.

WEDNESDAY

1 Kings 17:17-24

In Tim Keller's sermon on this passage, "A Widow's Joy," he asks whether we have a god of our own making or whether we are willing to trust in the One True Living God—the God that we cannot control. Will we tell God what He is to do, or will we humbly wrestle with what He is doing?

Here is this woman who has been taking care of Elijah, living day to day, trusting in God, and her son unexpectedly dies. Tim Keller points out that the widow's first response is not to blame God or to tell Him all the great things she has done for Elijah. Her first response is to look inward. To ask "Is this punishment for my sins? Is this a reminder?"

"Elijah takes the boy up to his room, looks up, and asks the same question: 'Oh Lord, is it? Is this punishment? Did you do this? Is this a stroke of judgment?' He doesn't know either. Both of them are saying, 'This is a sovereign God who might be doing this. This might be from God. This might be a stroke of judgment.'" (Timothy Keller)

Keller then says: "What is a living God and how is it different than any other kind of God? I'll tell you. An idol is something you project. An idol is a god you have designed to fit your mind, which means it's really an extension of your mind. An idol is a god who's under

your control. An idol is a god who doesn't do things you don't understand or like, because you just won't believe in a god like that."

You know you have a living God when He says things you don't understand and you don't like, but you still obey Him. When He sends things that you don't understand and you don't like, and you still serve Him.

Elijah has this unbelievable humble yet hopeful realism toward life. Elijah does not say, "How dare you? There's something wrong." But he also doesn't acquiesce; he doesn't say, "Well, it's Your will, Lord. You killed him. It doesn't matter. I can just abjectly grovel here. You are the great God. I am nothing but a peasant. I am nothing but a pawn in your hand."

Do you have a living God or a god you've projected? Do you have a God who can confound you and upset you? All too often we make our God too small. God can take our emotions, our anger, our questions. But He also asks for our trust and openness to His plans and ways that are so much larger than we might ever imagine.

PRAYERS FOR BRIAN AND ANNA KLEINSASSER

Please pray for the Kleinsassers to be the witnesses that Jesus has called them to be to the neighbors and people with whom they interact.

THURSDAY

1 Kings 18

Life is filled with choices. At the heart of our choices is: What god are we serving? Tim Keller says: “The word *ba'al* is a generic word. For many years I thought of Baal as a god like Zeus or like Hera or Athena. But the word *ba'al* is a generic name for any god. It’s a word that really means spiritual lord. This was a rain *ba'al*, but there was a beauty *ba'al* and there was a military *ba'al* and there was a party *ba'al*, and there was an educational god, and there was a wisdom god, and there was a scholarship god. When you take any created thing and you make it the thing that really makes you happy, the thing that really makes you significant, the thing that really makes you acceptable, it becomes a *ba'al*, and you get into *ba'al* worship.”

Obadiah serves King Ahab. In the process he has been used by God to protect many of God’s prophets. But now he is being asked to take a stand publicly, to make a choice, to take a risk. Following God does not mean that there will never be hard times. Following God often means that there will be times of decision.

A confrontation, a trial, is set up between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. It is a trial by fire. It is often in the midst of “fire” that we see who we really serve. It is often in the midst of tough times that we discover whether or not what we worship and what we feel is really

all-important. Is it able to support us? Is it really worth our devotion? All too often we find ourselves worshipping *both* God and *ba'al*. All too often, like the people in Elijah's day, we want *both/and*. But God continuously tries to help us see, often through wilderness experiences, that He *alone* is worthy of worship.

Tim Keller points out that one of the fascinating facts of this story is where the fire from heaven goes. God does not send a bolt of lightning to take out the prophets of Baal. The fire comes at the time of the daily sacrifice and consumes the sacrifice. The sacrifice in the Old Testament points to Jesus' death on a cross. Even in the midst of our false worship, we can find forgiveness and new life. But that new life requires action, the action of ridding ourselves of our false gods. Ask God to show you some of the "both/and's" in your life.

PRAYERS FOR BRIAN AND ANNA KLEINSASSER

Pray for the health of Brian and Anna as they deal with various aches and pain. They are blessed with overall good health, but they do realize that they are certainly getting older.

FRIDAY

1 Kings 19

Elijah has just come from a great victory. And yet, the vengeful words of a pagan queen send him running. He sits down under a broom tree and in despair, he quits. He cannot understand why, even after the fire from heaven, there is not total revival. Why have things not changed?

Even in the midst of such great despair with that feeling of wanting to die, Elijah does not presume on God. Instead, he takes the matter to God. In time, slowly and quietly God responds. First, God looks after Elijah's physical needs, and then He turns to Elijah's relational needs. He begins to question Elijah, to listen to him, to let him get his emotions out, to allow him to vent about his sense of failure and aloneness.

Having been strengthened by sleep and food, Elijah makes his way to the mountain of God. He has come to a faith crisis. Oh, he still believes in God; in fact, He is seeking God. But in the past, he thought he had a pretty good idea of what God was doing; now he is not so sure.

Elijah begins by looking for God in the big things, the noticeable things, such as the wind, earthquakes, and fire. But God came to Elijah in a still small whisper. And in that whisper, God both corrects Elijah's perceptions and gives him new marching orders. "Elisabeth Elliot, in her book *Through Gates of Splendor*, says: 'God is God, and if He is God, then there is no place safe except in His will, [which is] immeasurably, unspeakably, infinitely beyond any of your largest notions about what

he's up to.' One of the reasons we are so discouraged and so depressed is we put God in a box, and therefore, we get too pessimistic and sometimes we get too optimistic. Here's what's going on. God is teaching Elijah the gospel. What is the gospel? ... The gospel is you're more sinful than you ever dared believe, but you're more loved and accepted in Christ than you ever dared hope." (Tim Keller)

Elijah thinks he is all alone, but God tells him that he is not and to get back into fellowship. God does not answer all of his questions, but by sending him back the way he came, He sends him back into ministry. Our job is to be obedient, to be in fellowship with God, and to allow Him to feed us until the answers ultimately come with the return of Jesus.

Where are you tempted to box God in? When are you tempted to quit, or do you take your emotions to God?

PRAYERS FOR BRIAN AND ANNA KLEINSASSER

Pray for God's direction and guidance for Brian and Anna as they work with YWAM and other areas of ministry for God's Kingdom.

Sources:

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